

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

RS21326C2

This legislation establishes a Children and Families Legal Services Fund in the state treasury to be administered by appropriation to and disbursed by the Supreme Court. It will be funded through a twenty-dollar (\$20.00) filing fee on domestic relations actions which include such cases as divorce, custody, child support, paternity, legal separation and related matters.

The funds will assist Idaho Legal Aid Services (ILAS) to continue providing legal representation for indigent persons in specified civil matters involving domestic violence, abused and neglected children, elder care and exploitation, foreclosures, and veterans' issues.

ILAS is a non-profit law firm funded by a federal fund grant through the Legal Services Corporation (LSC) plus other smaller grants. Currently, Idaho is the only state in the nation that does not provide some form of supplemental funding for low income civil legal services. Forty-nine states provide financial assistance, either with a filing fee, state appropriation, or a combination of the two.

ILAS provides critical legal services to vulnerable Idahoans of limited means. Federal legal aid funds have been significantly reduced, endangering the continued existence of this resource for low income citizens. In 2011 and 2012 federal funding of over \$300,000 has been lost to ILAS, and additional significant reductions are expected. ILAS has been forced to cut salaries and staff, resulting in fewer indigent Idahoans being able to access the court system when the need for such services is at an all-time high.

FISCAL NOTE

There is no fiscal impact to the general fund, as these will be dedicated funds. It is estimated that the filing fee will generate approximately \$325,000 annually.

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